

CIVIL SERVICE
news

U.S. CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Washington, D.C.
20415

news unit

telephone: 343-7391
room 5354 / 1900 E st. N.W.

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ADVANCE FOR MONDAY MORNING NEWSPAPERS
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The Civil Service Commission has issued uniform minimum criteria to be used by all agencies which conduct full-field investigations of employees and applicants for appointment to critical-sensitive positions in the competitive civil service.

There has been a substantial degree of uniformity in the past, but this is the first time Government-wide standards have been issued.

The standards include the minimum scope and coverage of full-field investigations, criteria for the selection, training, and supervision of investigators, and strong safeguards against unwarranted invasion of privacy, including restrictions on the use of the polygraph.

In approving the recommendations of an interagency committee representing the major agencies which conduct full-field investigations, CSC Chairman John W. Macy, Jr., noted the extensive interest that has been given the subject by Members of Congress and the judiciary, civil rights and Federal employee organizations, and other groups and individuals. He expressed keen satisfaction that the new procedures will apply to all agencies which conduct full-field investigations for the competitive service.

Regarding the sanctions against unwarranted invasion of privacy, he said: "While the new policy applies to the investigation of persons for the competitive service, I would hope the same standards will be adopted by agencies which conduct investigations of persons for the excepted service."

Key elements of the new standards and procedures are as follows:

1. Scope and coverage of full-field investigations.

Basically, full-field investigations are designed to develop sufficient information to enable agency officials to determine the employability or fitness of persons entering critical-sensitive positions. Fitness includes both security and suitability considerations. Whenever practicable, the investigation should be conducted before employment, and investigative reports should be used as a personnel selection device.

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2.

Character, habits, morals, associations, and reputation will be investigated generally. Loyalty should be stressed particularly, and if a question is raised concerning the subject's loyalty, the case should be referred to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The affirmative qualities and qualifications of the subject should be developed fully. Over and above the minimum standards, the full-field investigation may be tailored to obtain information in depth concerning special attributes and qualifications required for proper performance in the particular kind of position being filled.

Full-field investigation of competitive service employees and applicants for critical-sensitive positions will be personally conducted investigations which cover the life of the individual, with emphasis on the person's background and activities during the most recent 15 years or since his 18th birthday, whichever is the shorter period. Particularly intensive investigation coverage will be obtained for the last 5-year period, and in addition, a thorough personal investigation will be made of any materially derogatory matters developed which may require investigation before the 5-year period.

Basic elements of the investigation will include appropriate name checks; personal interviews; checks of police records, credit records whenever practicable and justified, and other pertinent records as appropriate; verification of vital statistics and military service; verification of education claimed; and neighborhood investigation for the past 3 years.

2. Selection, training, and supervision of investigators.

Selection of investigators should be based upon sound indications of above-average mental capacity and verbal ability. Candidates should have demonstrated ability to meet and deal with people of all social and economic levels. They should themselves be the subjects of full-field investigations before appointment. They should demonstrate potential for growth.

Training and supervision of personnel investigators should meet three minimum requirements: initial training to provide a thorough grounding in the fundamentals of personnel investigations and agency missions; periodic refresher training to update skills and assure continuing competence; and supervision that is sufficiently close -- with review that is sufficiently frequent and thorough -- to assure good quality of investigating and reporting on a timely basis at a reasonable cost.

3. Avoiding unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Inquiries concerning an applicant will be limited to matters relevant to a determination of fitness for the position, including a determination as to whether his employment is clearly consistent with the national security.

3.

Investigators are not authorized to:

--Inquire about race, religion, national origin, union membership, fraternal affiliations, political affiliations, or the constitutionality or wisdom of legislative policies except when such information constitutes a bona fide qualification or fitness requirement for specific employment, is required to establish identity, or directly relates to security fitness or subversive activities.

--Investigate any case or person other than those officially assigned within their lawful duties.

--Interview witnesses without first showing credentials giving proper identification and informing the witness why the investigation is being conducted.

--Furnish information or ask questions in such manner as to indicate the investigator is in possession of derogatory information concerning the subject of investigation.

--Make covert or surreptitious investigations, or use such devices or techniques as mail covers, inspection of trash, or paid informants, except as any of the foregoing may specifically and individually first be authorized by the head of the agency or his designee.

--Use telephone or wire taps or covert listening or recording devices.

--Use the polygraph or other so-called lie detectors except as indicated below.

--Interview applicants or appointees to the competitive service concerning their sexual behavior or attitudes concerning sexual conduct in the absence of allegations or information indicating sexual misbehavior.

--Express opinions about the person under investigation.

--Investigate any case in which the investigator knows of circumstances which might adversely affect his fairness, impartiality, or objectivity, without first making this fact known to his superiors.

--Divulge any investigative information outside official channels.

--Make unauthorized intrusions on private property.

The new rules limit the use of the polygraph in the competitive service to agencies and parts of agencies which have intelligence or counter-intelligence missions directly affecting the national security and approaching in sensitivity the mission of the Central Intelligence Agency.

4.

Even when the use of polygraph examinations is authorized for competitive service positions by the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, the methods to be utilized in administering the examinations would be circumscribed, and polygraph procedures would be monitored to prevent abuses.

Written consent must be obtained from the person to be examined, and he must be apprised of his right to counsel.

Refusal to take the examination may not be recorded in the employee's personnel file.

Questions asked the employee or applicant must have specific relevance to the subject of the inquiry.

Charts and files resulting from administering the examinations must be properly safeguarded.

Each year, the head of an agency which has been granted authority to use the polygraph on competitive service employees and applicants must re-certify the facts on which permission was based. Polygraph operators must be fully qualified in their specialty.

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